Observers at LoC

1790. SHRI SATISH PRADHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any army or security personnel's delegation of 15 countries including America, United Kingdom and European countries has visited Line of Control for observing Pakistan's role to help terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir during the month of September, 2003; and

(b) if so, the reaction/response of the said delegation on Pakistan's role in terrorism?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) A visit was arranged for the Defence Attaches from 19 countries, stationed in New Delhi, to forward areas in the State of Jammu and Kashmir on September 29,2003. During the visit, they were also shown weapons and equipment captured from terrorists.

(b) They thanked the Indian Army for organising the visit that enabled them to gain a first hand perspective of the actual ground situation in Jammu and Kashmir. It was clear to those who were taken on this visit that infiltration took place from across the LoC and infiltrators received weapons training and other support from Pakistan.

Kolkata-Nepal Rail Service

1791. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE:
SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:-

(a) whether Government have signed any agreement with the Government of Nepal regarding introduction of Kolkata International Rail Service from Nepal *via* Raxual-Virganj in Bihar;

(b) if so, the details thereof and whether all formalities in this respect have been finalised;

(c) if so, the detail thereof; and

(d) by when the said agreement is likely to be implemented?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) to (d) With a view to facilitate movement of cargo between Kolkata/Haldia to Birgunj in Nepal *via* Raxaul in Bihar, a rail link has been established with Indian assistance between Raxaul and Birgunj. For operationalising this link, a railway protocol and customs agreement would have to be concluded between the two sides. The text of the Rail Services Agreement has been finalized and the Agreement is expected to be concluded shortly.

Free trade agreement between India and Thailand

1792. SHRI RUMANDLA RAAMACHANDRAYYA: DR. AKHILESH DAS:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India and Thailand have signed a Free Trade Agreement and four other accords for enhancing cooperation in agriculture, tourism and science and technology;

(b) if so, the details there of;

(c) the existing status of trade with Thailand indicating exports and imports from that country during 2001-02, 2002-03 and the likely trade during 2003-04 and the following year, indicating specifically trade in agricultural products; and

(d) the steps taken and being taken in pursuance thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) and (b) India and Thailand have signed five agreements for (i) Framework Agreement for Free Trade Area (ii) Exemption of Visas for holdters of Diplomatic & Official Passports (iii) Agricultural Science, Technology and Economy (iv) Tourism and (v) Biotechnology.

(c) and (d) India's exports to Thailand in 2001 -02 were US$ 632.58 m and in 2002-03 US$ 710.76 m. Imports from Thailand during the period were US$ 423.05 m and US$ 378.62 m respectively. In 2003, trade frorh April to September 2003 has crossed US$ 1.1b and is likely to reach US$2 b for the whole year. Trade in agricultural products is expected to go up with the coming into force in March 2004 of the Early Harvest Package under the FTA.